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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 49/189 of 23 December 1994, the General Assembly welcomed the continuing cooperation and assistance of the Centre for Human Rights in the further strengthening of the existing regional arrangements and regional machinery for the promotion and protection of human rights, with a view to exchanging any information and experience in the field of human rights.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly stressed the importance of the programme of advisory services in the field of human rights, and renewed its appeal to all Governments to consider making use of the possibilities offered by the United Nations under this programme. The General Assembly requested the Commission on Human Rights to continue to pay special attention to the most appropriate ways of assisting countries of the different regions under the programme of advisory services.

3. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has emphasized that the regional intergovernmental organizations are important and close partners of the United Nations human rights programme. Cooperation with these organizations is crucial in the planning and implementation of the United Nations human rights activities in various regions.

4. The General Assembly invited States in areas where regional arrangements in the field of human rights do not yet exist to consider concluding agreements with a view to the establishment within their respective regions of suitable regional machinery for the promotion and protection of human rights.

5. The Secretary-General was requested, as foreseen in the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, to continue to strengthen exchanges between the United Nations and regional intergovernmental organizations dealing with human rights and to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session a report on the state of regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights and to include therein the results of action taken in pursuance of resolution 49/189. The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND REGIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

A. Cooperation with the Council of Europe

6. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights/Centre for Human Rights participated in an expert seminar on human rights and the police, sponsored by the Council of Europe, which was held at the Palais de l'Europe, in Strasbourg, France from 6 to 8 December 1995.

7. Human rights awareness and education programmes, which have been developed and implemented by the Council of Europe, constitute an important contribution to the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

8. The Council of Europe and the United Nations programme of technical cooperation in the field of human rights continue to exchange on a regular basis, information on programmes and activities in Central and Eastern Europe.

9. The United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights and the Council of Europe, in accordance with recommendations of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, agreed that the jurisprudence of the Council would be regularly made available to the Centre. The Council also expressed its intention to make its jurisprudence available on the Internet and on CD-ROM. With respect to the Centre, it is envisioned that the full-text database developed for the treaty-monitoring bodies will be made accessible to the public in the context of the Centre's efforts to develop an Internet web site.

10. The United Nations human rights treaty bodies also engage in cooperation with regional institutions in the discharge of their functions to monitor the implementation of the respective instruments by States parties. Additionally, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights continues to receive information from the Council of Europe, which is taken into consideration in the analyses of the human rights situations in States parties whose reports are due to be considered. The Committee on Torture regularly receives reports from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe on visits to States parties to the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

B. Cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

11. From 1 to 4 July 1996, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, conducted a workshop on human rights monitoring for monitors of the OSCE mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The workshop, which was held in Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was attended by some 32 participants, and was facilitated by 12 resource persons.

12. The event was organized following agreement between the High Commissioner and OSCE, whereby the High Commissioner was to provide training to OSCE monitors in both the substance and the methodology of monitoring human rights in the mission area. It was the second element of a two-part programme, the first having been pre-deployment induction briefings provided by the High Commissioner's team at Vienna from 13 to 15 February 1996.

13. The High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights has carried out regular consultations with OSCE with regard to the exchange of information and the development and implementation of technical cooperation projects in the field of human rights, involving countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

C. Cooperation with the European Commission

14. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights cooperates with the European Commission in the context of programmes for Rwanda, Burundi and Colombia. The European Commission has provided 31 highly qualified and fully equipped personnel, who are working as an integral part of the United Nations Human Rights Field Operation in Rwanda. The European Commission has also agreed to provide financial support to the High Commissioner for his preventive human rights initiatives in Burundi. In this framework, five human rights officers have been deployed to the mission in Burundi. A further deployment of up to 35 human rights officers is being considered. The European Commission declared its willingness to provide financial support for the five staff members of the permanent office to be established in Colombia by the High Commissioner in accordance with the statement of 23 April 1996 of the Chairman of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Colombia.

D. Cooperation with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights

15. During the period covered by the present report, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights continued to provide financial support to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights under the Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. Part of the funds were used in support of the regional seminar on women's rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, held in Togo in March 1995.

16. In cooperation with the Organization for African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for

Human Rights organized a meeting of high-level government experts in the African region at Addis Ababa from 14 to 17 May 1996 on the international human rights treaty regime. The meeting assembled high-level government experts from States that had not submitted instruments of ratification, accession or succession to a number of the principal international human rights instruments. Participants were invited to discuss and reflect on all aspects of the international human rights treaty regime, including reporting obligations of States parties and implementation of those instruments, the use of reservations, the identification of obstacles to ratification and the development of strategies to overcome them.

17. The technical cooperation project in the field of human rights that the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights developed with the Government of Burundi has been implemented in cooperation with the observer mission of OAU in Burundi. The United Nations Centre for Human Rights has also cooperated with OAU in the development and implementation of a training programme on human rights, democracy and the rule of law for heads of military academies in Africa.

18. The High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights supported the First Regional Conference of African National Human Rights Institutions, organized by the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms of Cameroon at Yaoundé from 5 to 7 February 1996. This conference was the first regional initiative in the area of national institutions and was attended by representatives of 12 national institutions of the region and by several observers. A Coordinating Committee of African National Institutions was created as an outcome of the meeting.

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

19. As requested by the General Assembly as well as by the Commission on Human Rights in their numerous resolutions, in particular Commission on Human Rights resolution 1995/48 of 3 March 1995 on regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asian and Pacific region, the Secretary-General, during the period covered by the present report, continued to pay special attention to the countries in the Asian and Pacific region.

20. In this connection, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, upon requests from Governments in the Asian and Pacific region, has continued his efforts to enable countries in the region to benefit from all the activities under the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights. Technical cooperation projects in the field of human rights have been or are being developed with 12 Governments in the region. In addition, a regional workshop, the fourth one in the series, specifically on the subject of regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asian and Pacific region, was organized by the High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Government of Nepal, at Kathmandu from 26 to 28 February 1996. The meeting was addressed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal. It is important to note that, for the first time, the Governments of the region that attended the workshop concluded the meeting by drawing up workshop conclusions, in which specific steps were identified as building-blocks towards

the establishment of regional human rights machinery. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.4/1996/46 and Add.1), submitted in accordance with paragraph 15 of Commission on Human Rights resolution 1995/48, provides detailed information in this regard.

21. The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Human Rights Commission of New Zealand, in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights, organized the First Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop of National Human Rights Institutions at Darwin, Australia from 8 to 10 July 1996. The workshop brought together senior representatives of four national institutions of the region, as well as representatives of countries that were interested in or in the process of establishing national human rights institutions. The meeting decided to establish an Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions.

IV. PROGRAMME OF ADVISORY SERVICES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN THE FIELD OF HUMAN RIGHTS

22. The programme continued to grow during 1995. More than 200 activities were carried out by the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights in providing support to States. The attention of the General Assembly is drawn to the report of the Secretary-General on the programme (E/CN.4/1996/90).

V. CONCLUSION

23. The cooperation of the United Nations human rights programme with regional intergovernmental organizations has proved to be substantial and supportive. However, the potential of this cooperation with regard to human, organizational and financial resources is far from being exhausted. Good examples of cooperation, mutual assistance and the most efficient use of limited resources should guide us in the future. Within the framework of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, the United Nations will continue to strengthen exchanges with regional organizations with a view to better promoting human rights. Special attention will be paid to the Asian and Pacific region, where no regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights exist as yet. In this regard, the United Nations High Commissioner/Centre for Human Rights will continue to facilitate the step-by-step process of establishing regional human rights machinery through, inter alia, the organization of the annual regional workshop and by according priority to the needs of the countries in this region.